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ABSTRACT

Employment trends for sociologists in federal service are examined for the period 1975 to 1985. Bureau of Labor statistics indicate that the number of persons seeking employment as sociologists in both government and private positions in the 1980s is likely to greatly exceed available job openings. Figures show that for an average of 800 sociology positions becoming available each year, there are approximately 800 new Ph.D.s, 2,000 M.A.s, and 27,000 B.A.s. The total number of declared sociologists employed in the Federal Civil Service as of March 31, 1979 was 91--although surveys by the National Science Foundation indicate that approximately 1,500 people who hold Civil Service positions could actually be classified as sociologists, even though they are not listed as such in federal personnel files. The number of sociologists employed in Civil Service represents a gradual increase since 1966 due, in large part, to efforts by the American Sociological Association to establish professional acceptability of sociologists. Individuals interested in seeking federal employment as sociologists are encouraged to visit federal employment centers and to pursue informal contact with sociologists who are familiar with federal employment opportunities. (DB)

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SOCIOLOGISTS IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

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(Prepared for Presentation at the 74th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association: August 1979; Boston, Massachusetts).

Introduction - Employment of Sociologists in U.S.

At the present time Federal Service is one kind of "alternative service" for sociologists in the United States since their occupational norm is primarily academic. Of the 19,000 or so sociologists** in the United States labor force in 1978 fully 80% are employed in colleges and universities. (U.S. Department of Labor, 1978).

A grim employment projection for sociologists is made by the Bureau of Labor Statistics this year, on the basis of the following figures:

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*The views expressed in this report are those of the author and should not be construed as an official position of the Army Research Institute.

**Estimates of the total number of sociologists in the United States, or in any sub-category, vary depending greatly on the varying occupational and educational definitions of what is a sociologist. For example, differences between the purposes and procedures of the Bureau of Labor Statistics the Bureau of Census, and the American Sociological Association result in sometimes non-comparable groupings and figures. Further ambiguity is introduced by the complicated Civil Service occupational and job classificatory systems, as will be discussed later in this presentation.

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Employment, 1976	19,000
Projected Employment, 1985	21,700
Percent growth, 1976-1985	14.5
Average annual openings, 1976-85	800
Growth	300
Replacement	500

Available training data:
Degrees in sociology

	1975-6	Projected 1976-85 (annual average)
Bachelor's degree	27,634	27,098
Master's degree	2,009	2,306
Doctor's degrees	729	794

These fugures indicate that for an average of 800 positions becoming available each year there are not only about 800 new Ph.Ds but also 2,000 M.A.s and 27,000 BAs.

In the '70s a trend began for new Ph.D.s in the social sciences to go into non-traditional employment slots "neither sought not filled by similar Ph.D.s during the '60s" (Ibid., p. 21). This trend will probably continue into the 1980s. With special regard to sociologists, BLS forecasts:

> The number of persons seeking to enter this field is likely to greatly exceed available job openings. Persons who have Ph.D. degrees face increasing competition, particularly for academic positions, and some may accept part-time temporary jobs. Others may take research and administrative positions in government, industry, research organizations, and consulting firms. Master's degree holders may face very stiff competition, but some, particularly those who have strong training in quantitative research, statistical and computer methods, may teach in junior colleges or find jobs in government agencies, research firms, and industry. Bachelor's degree holders are expected to find their job opportunities as administrative or researchassistants, while others may continue their studies in law, journalism, social work, recreation, counseling, and related disciplines. (U.S. Department of Labor, 1979b).

Federal Civil Service Opportunities for Sociologists - Classified as Sociologists

Against this general employment background for sociologists, our special interest here today is to examine what opportunities for sociologists exist in the Federal Civil Service.

Fact is that the Federal Civil Service isn't all that hospitable to sociologists qua sociologists. The total number of these employed in the federal government as of March 31, 1979 was 91. (Unpublished data, Office of Personnel Management, Bureau of Management Statistics). (Incidental intelligence: This compares with 3110 psychologists for the same period, and 3335 social workers. The corresponding total for anthropologists is a mere 41. The mean salary for these 91 sociologists is currently $25,591: their grade levels range from GS-5 to GS-15: mean grade level is GS-11.51. In the last five years, sociologists, GS series-184, have been dispersed in a dozen different agencies with some concentration the Departments of Health, Education and Welfare and Army. (Unpublished data, Civil Service Commission, October, 1977.) In 1976 men outnumbered women about five to three and the Washingtonians outnumbered those in other parts of the United States about five to three. (U.S. Civil Service Commission, 1976). Almost no other recent Civil Service facts about series-184 sociologists are published or even otherwise available.

History of the Establishment of a Civil Service Classification for Sociologists

The grand total of 91 represents a gradual increase over the past thirteen years, as indicated in unpublished data of the Bureau of Management Statistics:

Year	# of Sociologists So Classified
1976	87
1975	85
1974	79
1973	69
1972	76
1971	56
1970	53
1969	48
1968	45
1966	22

The American Sociological Association was instrumental in the effort to establish the GS-184 classification, Sociologist and Supervisory Sociologist, GS-5 through 15. (Medalia and Mason, 1963) The struggle for professional recognition continued under the leadership of the D.C. Sociological Society which lobbied for the establishment of a Register for "sociologists" -- i.e., a list of persons from which an agency could draw when a worker with specifically sociological skills was needed. The effort to upgrade the professional status of sociologists in the federal government still continues, as ASA representatives currently meet with Civil Service staff people for the purpose of improving qualification statements and increasing the utilization of sociologists in government positions where they are needed.

The long history of trying to establish professional acceptability of sociologists is sociologically interesting, and you will see that it has not yet been totally consummated, as we return to discussion of the current situation with regard to sociologists in Federal Civil Service.

Sociologists in Civil Service, not classified as Sociologists

With close to 20,000 employed "sociologists" in the United States today, a less than five-tenths of 1% odds of becoming a federal government sociologist may seem like a good reason to head for the door. Before you do, let me tell you that there is something misleading about the facts just quoted. Actually, there may be less chance for a sociologist qua sociologist to get into the federal government than for the proverbial camel to get through the eye of a needle. However, for a sociologist qua something else, it's a different story.

An uncounted, apparently uncountable, number of persons with degrees in sociology are employed in varied civil service classifications and in numerous federal government agencies. (I spent a long time trying to find the number, and the reasons why it is not available from Civil Service Commission, now known as the Office of Personnel Management, are very complicated. They have to do with how the educational and/or experience requirements for particular positions are stipulated, and with what "data" are collected or not collected on the educational background of persons employed as Civil servants. The bottom line is that the specific number of sociologists in the federal civil service is of interest mainly to other sociologists, and not the Civil Service System. The best estimate of sociologists in the Civil Service that I could come up with, derived from the unpublished National Science Foundation survey of U.S. Scientists and Engineers for 1976, is around 1500.

Requirements for Civil Service positions are generally stated in terms of alternative education and experience qualifications.

For example, the wording may be "one full academic year of graduate education in a field of the social and behavioral sciences" as for an Administrative Officer GS341 (U.S. Civil Service Commission, 1975) or, as in the case of Community Health Educator, training may be required "in a field of education or in a subject field with which the position is directly concerned" (Ibid, GS-1701). Conceivably a sociologist might fill either of these positions; he/she might fill many other positions. But to the Civil Service he/she would be known as an Administrative Officer or as a Community Health Educator, or whatever, but not as a Sociologist.

The total number of positions which possibly could be filled by sociologists is many many times the 90-and-1 designated as "GS-184 Sociologist."

Practical Guidelines for Entry into Civil Service

My mission here is not to conduct a do-it-yourself workshop on gaining entry into the Civil Service. But I recognize that a good many of you may be here for such a practical purpose. So on the table you will find a rich assortment of brochures which will inform you better than I can regarding recruitment. These are yours for the taking at the end of this meeting, and if you have any questions which I can answer I shall be happy to do so.

Just a few statements to quickly put these materials in perspective. You should know that there are three levels of Civil Service employment. People with a BA enter as trainees in a lower level position (Grades GS-5 or 7 - $10,507 to $13,014 per annum). They present themselves at their area Federal Job Information Center (brochure provided), whose telephone number is listed in metropolitan area directories under "U.S. Government."

They qualify by filling out the proper forms and by taking the so-called PACE test (Professional and Administrative Career Examination (brochure provided). In accordance with their rating on this test they are placed in line for any of a goodly number of positions in the geographical and occupational areas they have designated. In the "Lower Level Announcements" under the following headings "job opportunities," "requirements," "how to apply," "what happens to your application" and "some additional information" most of your questions are anticipated.

"Middle Level Announcements"(brochure provided) tell of openings at the GS-9, 11 or 12 level, requiring at least an M.A. degree. Salaries start at $15,920, $19,263 and $23,087 respectively. For these positions there are no assembled examinations, but the submission of the individual's application Forms 171 (samples provided) on which a person lists his/her qualifications. These qualifications then are rated and matched with appropriate vacancies.

Senior level positions, GS-13 and above (brochure provided) may be filled in the same way. Educationaland experience requirements are greater than at the middle level, or course, and so are the salaries, ranging from $27,453.

To familiarize you with the format in which Qualification Standards are presented I've set out some xeroxed copies of the Qualification Standards for the GS-184, the professional sociology position. You will note these essential topics are covered: Description of work; Basic Requirements for All Grades; Additional Experience and Training Requirements, Basis of Rating, etc.

Informal Routes to Civil Service Jobs

So much for the official facts and the formalities. Mainly what I would like to offer is not written in the useful brochures and other documents on this table. I'd like to share with you, from my own experiences and those of some sociological colleagues in the Federal Service to whom I've spoken, and also from written sources, our observations concerning the job-seeking process, and concerning some of the characteristic satisfactions and frustrations of this setting.

As any good sociologist would guess, the formal route to a job (as diagrammed, for instance, on page 11 of the Working for the USA brochure) is often not the only, or even the best, way to get the job. An informal network of colleagues, mentors and insiders can short-cut the institutional route and/or expedite passage. For example: new Ph.D. comes to Washington with her husband in 1964: wants research experience; one of her major professor's friends heads a research unit in NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health); young sociologist visits professor's friend, who has no vacancies in his own unit but knows of vacancy in another unit. The research focus of this unit is on dental problems, with which our young sociologist has had no professional experience, but the unit has "a critical mass of Ph.D. and MA sociologists" which would provide a built-in colleagueship, training, and the real-world experience she seeks. She interviews for the vacancy, qualifies, and accepts a temporary appointment as a "Social Science Analyst" pending the establishment of a register.

Through the years her classification has changed several times, even when her job remained quite the same, from Social Sciences Analyst to Public Health Analyst, to Research Sociologist, Health Science Administrator . . . She has risen in the GS ranks, and in her reputation both as a sociologist and as an expert in the subject matter field she entered by chance fifteen years ago.

The deliberate creation of a slightly different kind of network is exemplified by the efforts of the National Women's Political Caucus which was established to see to it that President Carter's campaign promises with regard to women in government are carried out. One of its activities has been to keep up with the job situation in each department and maintain a file of mid-level vacancies. Job-seeking women can consult with the Caucus either in Washington or in any of the other places where branches of the Caucus exits. A subsidiary activity in the capital city has been the Washington Women's Network which is informal, purely social, providing for women the same sort of functions traditionally performed for their male counterparts by the old boys network.

Another route to federal employment is, of course, through the informal contacts and the more formal Employment Centers which operate at both the regional meetings and at the annual meetings of our own professional society.

The tale of my own entry into the federal government from academe will serve as a final illustration of the entry process, and also as a transition to the final sub-topic of this report: the plusses and minuses of federal employment.

About six years ago I learned at a meeting like this that the Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences was looking for a research sociologist with expertise in the area of race relations.

A new major research area called Social Processes had been set up in this Institute "to address the issues of societal change affecting individual soldiers and the Army as a whole." (Uhlaner, 1977). Although the Army Research Institute was composed mainly of research psychologists --industrial, experimental and testing -- and statisticians, the Social Processes area was headed by a sociologist. He was to hire a staff of sociologists to create a new "Tech Area" intended as interdisciplinary in composition and outlook. I liked that. I cared a lot about the race research area, about the questions to be addressed, the opportunity for field work and travel. The prospect of dealing with real-world problems and the chance to impact on policy were also attractive to me. My hesitations were mainly on an ethical level - questions of unhampered inquiry and utilizable results.

This is not the occasion for a review of my own experiences in the last five years as a GS-184. Out of that experience, however, along with assessments by sociologists from other vantage points, I would like to describe some of the positive-negative features of employment in the government.

Opportunities and Constraints Affecting Sociologists in the Civil Service.

One sociologist's debit is another one's asset, of course. But before we discuss more controversial issues, here are a few mundane facts of life in the civil service.

The time schedule of a civil servant comes often as a culture shock to one accustomed to the patterned irregularities of academe. The usual Government work week is 40 hours, but the recent introduction of "flexitime" permits some personal accommodation in daily arrivals and departures. Currently a Bureau of Personnel Management Committee is working on a plan to consider the options of a 4-day or even 3-day week.

Salaries compare favorably with the academic ones, not so favorably with private enterprise. Job security, promotion and retirement provisions are generally favorable. Work conditions and job characteristics vary with the character of each particular work setting.

One sociologist stated these negatives in her personal and job situation: Problems of professional identity; lesser prestige than academic sociologist; the blurred or unfavorable image of sociologists held by others, who are not at all clear about what we can contribute; our jealousy toward researchers we fund to do the research we'd like to be doing ourselves; difficulties in communicating across disciplinary lines and outside our own frame of reference; and the myriad problems of bureaucracy.

With regard to the bureaucracy issue, a sociologist serving in an administrative position expressed frustration in trying to deal comprehensively with a complex problem when its ramifications fell in several bureaucratic jurisdictions. She observed that sociologists are often overlooked in research situations where their perspectives and research approaches would be useful, while specialists with greater visibility and quicker turn-around time are chosen instead.

As an example she named "economists who have a high technological development and a prestigious methodology, who can reduce a question to fewer variables," (I was reminded by that remark, as frequently in my own governmental research setting, of a comment by that non-sociologist H. L. Mencken concerning human problems: "There's always a solution that's simple, neat and wrong.")

Still another government sociologist, in a research rather than an administrative position, cited the difficulty in working under supervisors who were all psychologists, since he perceived their perspective as a narrow one. Nevertheless he acknowledged that a sociologist with professional initiative could often find a way to be productive, and he emphasized other advantages to federal employment over academic employment such as relatively greater opportunities for communication with peers and greater opportunity to devote oneself full time to research.

From my own perspective the two negatives that matter most are 1) the frequent re-orientation in our research projects due to internal or external policy or budget changes and 2) the limits set on our role in the application of findings.

Much has been written recently about social science and social policy (Demerath, 1975; Etzione, 1971; Fennessey, 1972; Foote, 1975; Gelfland, 1975; Gouldner, 1965; McDowell, 1978; Scott, 1974; Weber, 1978; Wright, 1967). Utilization of sociologists is endorsed, for example, in terms of the "growth in non-academic research centers" (Janowitz, 1972), by the "growing demand for sociological wisdom" (Street and Weinstein, 1975), and the "role of the sociologist on interdisciplinary teams." (Tuchfield, 1976).

But the real life situation is, as I see it, that it takes considerably more than sociologists' findings and their recommendations to rearrange the priorities of a researched agency or institution. Sociologists can write reports; they may even be granted the right to propose some changes consistent with the goals of the research sponsor; but the right to dispose belongs elsewhere. Pens are not mightier than swords, nor mightier than the protocols, hierarchies or traditions of the organizations we research.

In my experience, the sociological role is largely limited to the collection of data, submission of findings, and their circulation in the common market of ideas. We can only hope that our research products get to the decision-makers in the places where we work, or the institutions which we study, and that in the course of time, the decision-makers will find our data and our words relevant and useful.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that we in the Federal Service do not have the intellectual segregationof the ivory tower. We are close to the cross-roads of ideas and ideologies, though our status be that of marginal people. And we can be vitalized by the challenge of vital problems.

In summary, it seems to me that plusses and minuses are inextricably intertwined and the balance for any particular person must be individually determined.

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